THIRTY CONVERSATIONS ON DESIGN

Transcript of response to two questions - 2009

**1)	WHAT SINGLE EXAMPLE OF DESIGN INSPIRES YOU THE MOST?**

**2)	WHAT PROBLEM SHOULD DESIGN SOLVE NEXT?**

It is very difficult for me to name only ONE SINGLE example for each of the two questions. I do not believe that "Design" works in isolation like what the questions seems to imply. In fact, I think that as a human race, the biggest challenge we face is to come to terms with "WHO" we are, and "HOW" we relate to the world that surrounds us. It's ironic that with all the technological advances, those age-old questions are becoming even more acute and pressing. In this context, I would like to start by responding to the second question, "What problem should design solve next?" I think the answer is obvious. As designers today, whether we are working in architecture, graphics, industrial design, branding, or any other medium we can think of, we should address this problem of how to reconcile our own survival on the planet with the quality of life that we have been accustomed to.

Nowadays, there is a lot of talk and rhetoric out there about "Green" design or being ecologically conscious. Frankly speaking, I think that's a bit of a fad. There have always been talks about being energy conscious since the 60s. To me, the current trend is just a re-hash of what good design should incorporate for ages. All the ancient civilizations, like the Mayans, the Incas, or the

American Indians have all lived in an eco-friendly way many years ago. So there is nothing new to that idea. Perhaps our consumer society today has magnified the importance of that.

To look at the problem through a different lens, we might want to begin by re-thinking the little things of our daily lives. One of the problems that stand out is the amount of WASTE we produce as a society. Especially in America, the amount of junk food we consume, the fuel, the energy, the list goes on and on. Why do most people think that they need to live in houses that are so big? Why do people commute for hours in their car from their sub-urban homes to their workplaces? Why are people buying all these things they do not need, with money they do not have? Isn't that the root of our current financial problem? Are we not depleting our natural resources just to satisfy that urge for excess? So I think as designers, we might begin by thinking how to manage and minimize this waste in our culture, without compromising the highest level of quality. There are so many so-called designs out there that have confused "excess" with "innovation". We should re-orient our priorities to focus on what is essential. How do we develop a creative discipline that keeps us from indulgence and waste of our resources, but continues to allow for us the highest level of creative freedom? Like all good design in the ages, it might just get boiled down to finding the ESSENCE of who we are and what we need in order to BE, in the existential sense. I know it sounds simple, but I hope that it's not simplistic. And I know it's very, very difficult to achieve.

Going back to the first question of what is the one single inspiration for me, I suppose since I am an architect, it would be easy to name a building. And my favorite building of all time is the Chapel of Ronchamp by the French modern architect Le Corbusier. I have made my pilgrimage there many times; the most recent trip was just this past August. The light inside the chapel is so divine and the way it relates to the French countryside is so beautiful. On the other hand, as someone who is interested in aesthetics and contemporary culture, I could also name something like the Internet, or the computer, or maybe even an ipod or iphone.   But I think that to find real inspiration today, we may have

to look beyond the latest gadgets. I feel that it should be something more timeless and spiritual. I live by Venice Beach. I love getting up early in the morning to watch how the light changes on the horizon during sunrise. That's inspiration to me. But if I have to name one example of "Design", I would say it's the Mandela.

As we know, the Mandela is supposed to represent the Oneness of the Universe with our subconscious in the Buddhist cosmology.   Even more powerful is the idea that the Mandela would be destroy, so to speak, after the monks have spend a long time "visualizing" it by drawing it with sand.   That very act of *Creation* by visualization, followed by its *Concretization* resonates with the transient and rootless nature of our contemporary existence in the most profound way.

Having said that, I want to clarify that I am not Buddhist, nor am I religious or "New Age". I am speaking of the Mandela from a purely aesthetic and design sense. I find incredible richness and complexities in its simple geometry of squares and circles. Realized with all the living colors, the Mandela seems to have infinite variations in its design and pattern. And if our appreciation of it gives a spiritual dimension, that's an added benefit. I am by no means knowledgeable about all the symbolisms in the Mandela design, but I think its form is so rich and so powerful that it transcends all religions and societies. I never get tired of staring at it, to see if I can arrive at new meanings. I think that the WHOLENESS we see in the form of the Mandela can inspire us to find the ESSENCE in ourselves and in our world…

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